

Research Information Network
Discovering physical objects:
Meeting researchers' needs report



Notes of meeting with Expert Panel at the British Library on 6 March 2009

The Research Information Network held a productive meeting with representatives from Collections Trust, East Midlands Museums Service (EMMS), Glasgow Museums, Museums Association, Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), the Science Museum, London and the V&A, to discuss follow up to the [Discovering physical objects: Meeting researchers' needs](#) report (October 2008).

Several of the participants commented on how valuable and timely the report was and that it was of particular relevance both to their plans to update their museum's website and in respect of the need to work collaboratively, both across the museum sector itself and with other sectors, in order to provide the best access to information and objects for researchers, whatever their background.

The wide ranging discussion covered:

- how museums can create a specific product or service for researchers
- support for the idea of collaboration between libraries archives and museums
- a recognition that researchers want to see the real thing and that therefore, what they would find most useful is digital/online information about what museums hold, and
- for the MLA, key issues included a focus on the need to review digitisation policy and move to a more targeted approach which matched resources to identified need and where digital finding aids, as well as digitization, could play a greater part.

It was also noted that moving forward in the areas identified by the report would not be without problems including, in some cases: the constraints on museums working with local authority websites; the fact that researchers are not necessarily a target audience for all. The group noted that there is no lead body for museums in Scotland equivalent to MLA in England or CyMAL in Wales though the single sector, Museums and Galleries Scotland performs this role.

Key suggested outputs included:

1. The creation of a template for a Researchers' Charter which would help to manage expectations both of researchers and of museum staff and which could be adapted for use by museums large or small and regardless of their focus. An example can be found at www.wiltshireheritage.org.uk/services/index.php?Action=6
2. Provision of support for smaller museums by enabling data from a range of catalogues to be harvested into one database which could be accessed from an even wider range of websites
3. Museum Designation Scheme should include support for research more directly, and potentially incentivising museums by giving grants to link them with research more directly.
4. Dialogue with researchers and museum staff in a series of broad subject based meetings to discuss how museums can support researchers' needs: one option being to use the Subject Specialist Networks and the Learned Societies
5. Linkages between museums and libraries / library collections.

Next Steps

RIN will investigate further with the participants as to how these recommendations can be taken forward.

Contact

If you are interested in receiving a hard copy of the report or finding out more about the project, email sarah.gentleman@rin.ac.uk